

The culture and language learning of Chinese festivals in a kindergarten classroom¹

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Culture plays a vital role in second language learning. This paper presents an action research study that investigates the role of culture in a Chinese language program in a kindergarten classroom. Three topics have been explored: (a) culture as the core in the development of a thematic unit on Chinese festivals, (b) a culturally responsive pedagogy as a model of instruction, and (c) the assessment of student learning. Nine kindergarten children participated in this study. The thematic unit was undertaken for eight consecutive weeks. Five major Chinese festivals were integrated into this unit; the teaching and learning processes were examined to explore the application of a culturally responsive pedagogy. Diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments were administered to explore the children's learning. The assessments were based the participants' oral response to one-to-one interviews, their written responses on the Pictorial Attitudes Scale in a whole-group session, cultural artefacts, and drawing and writing products.

Thematic curriculum unit, Chinese culture and language, multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Teaching culture as an integral part of language has gained importance in the Twenty-first century as a result of internationalisation and globalisation of communication (Lange and Paige, 2003). Although increased attention has been paid to the role of culture in second language learning and teaching, the major interest is still focused on the areas of reading and writing in learning a foreign language (Lafayette, 2003). Some teachers believe that culture takes the focus away from language learning and that cross-cultural experiences are too challenging and may cause discomfort to both the teacher and the learner (Lange and Paige, 2003).

On the other hand, a growing number of people in the language teaching profession are calling for a greater emphasis on culture. Kramsch (1993) believed that cultural context encourages diverse ways of thinking, viewing, speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Similarly, Crozet, and Liddicoat (2000) acknowledged that culture affected an individual's thoughts, actions, and words and they further assert that cultural understanding was fundamental in language learning and teaching. Papademetre (2000) has developed pathways for conceptualising the integration of culture and language and for multi-faceted discussions in cultural and linguistic practices.

A collaborative project has resulted in the development and publication of Standards for foreign language learning: Preparing for the 21st century (National Standards, 1999), which identifies the central role of culture in the language curriculum. The publication identifies the five C's in foreign language learning: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities.

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It also explicitly addressed culture learning in two aspects of these factors: (a) cultures—to gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures, and (b) comparisons—to develop insights into the nature of language and culture. The importance of culture in second language learning, as described in this publication is as follows: (National Standards, 1999, p.3):

Through the studies of other languages, students gain knowledge and understanding of the culture that uses that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural context in which the language occurs.

United States as a Multicultural Society

The United States is a giant multicultural society given the fact that her population is composed of people from numerous and diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Tiedt and Tiedt, 2005). According to the 2000 United States Census, it is anticipated that by the end of 2020 close to 40 per cent of United States students will be from culturally diverse backgrounds (Irvine and Armento, 2001). The United States Department of Commerce anticipates that students of colour (i.e., Latino students, African Americans, and Asian Americans) will constitute about 57 per cent of the nation's school-age children by 2050 (United States Department of Commerce, 1996).

The population of Chinese-speaking people residing in the United States is about 2.43 million, and Chinese language has become the third most commonly spoken language at home after English and Spanish (United States Bureau of the Census, 2000). The immigration policy, and the resultant executive order issued by President Bush has offered permanent resident status to 80,000 people from China, and has accelerated the growth of Chinese-speaking population in the United States (Lu, 2001). In addition, the adoption of Chinese children by Americans is becoming very common, and currently there are more than 20,000 adopted Chinese children residing in the United States (Manning, 2001). Johnson (2000) has reported that Asian Americans comprised about four per cent of the United States population in 1997, of which the Chinese-speaking population constituted the largest Asian ethnic group or 22 per cent. According to Johnson (2000), New York City and vicinity appeared to have the third largest Chinese-speaking population in the United States, after Los Angeles and San Francisco (Lai, 2001).

Multicultural Education

The movement toward a culture-based approach to language teaching prepares learners to participate in the multilingual and multicultural society in the United States. The publication of Standards for foreign language learning: Preparing for the 21st century (National Standards, 1999) calls attention to the importance of culture-based language learning in the United States as a multicultural society. The philosophical statement addresses this issue (National Standards, 1999, p.2):

The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society. This imperative envisions a future in which all students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical.

The increasing number of culturally diverse students amplifies the need to deliver multicultural programs for the heterogeneous populations while the rapidly growing Chinese-speaking population encourages us to value the teaching of Chinese culture and language courses in schools in the United States. Multicultural education promotes the rights of minority students (Wardle and Cruz-Janzen, 2004). In order to provide more professional knowledge and skills for teaching in today's multicultural context, teachers must be able to meet the needs of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Tiedt and Tiedt, 2005).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

A responsive pedagogy has been asserted by a number of researchers as an effective means of meeting the learning needs of culturally diverse students. The terms of culturally 'relevant' pedagogy and 'culturally responsive pedagogy' have been used interchangeably. Gay (2000, p.29) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as being "culturally validating and affirming"). Gay (2000, p.29) further asserted that a culturally relevant pedagogy used "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective".

A culturally responsive pedagogy recognises the need to develop a sensitivity to both teachers' and students' culture. Students from diverse cultural groups bring to schools beliefs, values, and norms that are different from the mainstream culture of the school. Effective teaching should acknowledge and support the distinctive culture system of each student group. It is, therefore, important to examine the home-school culture continuity in order to gain insight into the individual student's literacy experience (Xu, 1999). Ruan's study (2003) on bilingual students' learning promotes the idea that in order to be culturally aware; a teacher needs to be sensitive to bilingual children's learning styles and needs, family literacy practices, and interactive patterns.

Critical reflection is considered as an important ingredient for culturally responsive pedagogy by a number of scholars. Dewey provided a philosophical framework for this subject. From his perspective, reflection was an active and deliberate cognitive process used to solve problems while reflective action referred to the active components of behavioural interventions (Dewey, 1933). Calderhead (1989) related the issues of equity, access, and social justice to critical reflection. Howard (2003, p.197) further defined the term critical reflection as "reflection within moral, political, and ethical contexts of teaching".

Culture is Fundamental in Second Language Learning and Teaching

Definition of culture

Culture as a concept is something that is shared among some members in a society. While the traditional models view culture as a static complex of classifiable facts, contemporary models consider the dynamic and interactive nature of culture. Both anthropologists and sociologists define culture as a complex that includes the elements of attitudes, beliefs, values, ideologies, knowledge, art, morals, laws, customs, ways of behaving and thinking, and other capacities and habits acquired by humans as members of a society (Darder, 1991; Lange and Paige, 2003).

The contemporary definition of culture is dynamic and interactive. Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2003) describe cultural learning as a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for communication and interaction with individuals. Smith, Paige and Steglitz (2003) also propose a dynamic view of culture as the process of organising our diversity. This definition acknowledges the uniqueness of the individuals and also recognises their connection to the diversity. Similarly, Bennett, Bennett, and Allen (2003) depict an interactive view of culture as both objective and subjective. Objective culture is considered the cultural creation, including religious, educational, political institutions and artefacts of formal culture such as eating, costumes, and marriage. The definition of subjective culture by Bennett et al. (2003) is similar to the traditional view, in which culture is the verbal and nonverbal language, values, and cognitive style.

Culture in second language learning

Language and culture are inseparable. Culture is represented in part through language while language is manifested through culture (Brody, 2003). Cultural understandings are the underpinnings of communication and language learning, and therefore cultural learning is a

crucial element in the language classroom (Damen, 2003). To comprehend a message from a native speaker, it is essential to attend to the cultural meanings conveyed through body language and communication patterns (Damen, 2003). Smith, Paige, and Steglitz (2003) indicate that the deeper culture is manifested in how language is used in the cultural context. This notion is congruent with the Standards for Foreign Language Learning. The introductory section states, although communication is the heart of second language learning, students “cannot truly master the language unless they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs” (National Standards, 1999, p.3). A lack of cultural knowledge puts a learner at risk of being culturally incompetent in communicating with native speakers (Crozet and Liddicoat, 2000). In a second language context where a native speaker community is not accessible, culture has to be taught explicitly by drawing the learners’ attention to cultural differences (Crozet and Liddicoat, 2000).

Context of culture and language learning

Over the past 40 years, there has been a search for settings (classroom versus naturalistic settings) that could facilitate culture and language learning (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby, 2003). In the 1960s, attention was directed to the role of context and experience in the learning process, and a lot of support was given to experience-based learning, such as culture simulations in the classroom or study abroad program; in the 1970s, the attention shifted toward cognitively-based instruction; From the 1980s onward, the actual context that best promoted culture and language learning was favoured (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby, 2003).

New culture can be grasped and understood by exposing the learner to a cultural context where culture is integrated into language learning. As Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2003) indicate, culture and language is learned from a dynamic interaction among the context, prior experience, and the individuals. Classroom-based learning is a common context. Some researchers point out that the rule-ordered characteristics in the formal classroom fail to engage appropriately students in the communication process and lead to superficial learning (Damen, 1987; Ellis, 1992; Pica, 1983). On the other hand, other researchers argue that the structured classroom, as a protective environment or an artificial community, benefits culture and language learning by allowing students to safely experiment with the language and culture (Kramsch, 1993; Mitchell, 1988).

Teacher and student variables in culture learning

Research suggests that a teacher needs to take the role of an educator, who deliberately helps students analyse the process of learning about culture (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby, 2003). Effective learning relies on the teacher’s attitudes, goals, and priorities about culture in language education (Robinson, 1981). However, many United States studies reveal that culture learning ranks below language proficiency in the estimation of language teachers (Cooper, 1985; Wolf and Riordan, 1991). Many teachers are not able to develop cultural competence as they have little or no experience with different cultures (Bennett, Bennett, and Allen, 2003).

Therefore, an important reason to integrate culture into language teaching is to increase student motivation and positive attitudes toward language learning. Both motivation and attitudes are considered to be major factors influencing achievement. Motivation is the factor that impels students to learn while attitudes are students’ feelings toward learning (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby, 2003). Gardner and Lambert (1972) propose two clusters of motivational indices: integrative and instrumental. The instrumental motivation is the desire to achieve language proficiency for other purposes, such as studying abroad, doing business, or communicating with people in the target culture. The integrative motivation looks for a sense of identifying with the group of people in the target culture.

Despite of the close connection between these motivations and attitudes, there are conceptual distinctions between them. For example, a person who is highly motivated to learn Chinese language does not necessarily develop positive attitudes toward Chinese culture. Gardner (1985) suggests a reciprocal relationship between high motivation and success in learning. Similarly, Robinson (1981) hypothesises that favourable attitudes toward a culture will not automatically lead to language acquisition, nor will exposure to a foreign language necessarily cause positive attitudes toward the culture. However, contacting people from the target culture can improve student attitudes toward language learning (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby, 2003).

Integrating literature into the language classroom

A number of researchers claim that there is a crucial role played by children's literature in the language and multicultural classroom. Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2003) assert that literature can be an ideal carrier of culture. Wallace (2006) identifies the function of literature by stating that literature transports children to new cultural contexts, giving them an insight into the perspectives of the people, and providing them with vicarious experiences (Wallace, 2006). Johnson and Janisch (1998) assert that children's picture books provide an engaging focus for teaching and offer opportunities for modelling reading and thinking. Huck, Kiefer, Hepler, and Hickman (2004) support this notion by indicating that children enjoy reading literature, which provides enjoyment, a way of thinking, imagination, and vicarious learning. Both Norton and Irving connect literature to cultural appreciation. Norton (2005) indicates that literature plays a crucial role in promoting cross-cultural awareness and appreciation. Irving (1984) points out that the theme, characters, plot, and style from the story or folktale all provide clues to cultural values and attitudes that may enhance cultural understanding and appreciation. "Children prefer those stories that best represent their own way of looking at the world" (Huck, Kiefer, Hepler, and Hickman, 2004, p.36). Therefore, it is important to select literature that correctly depicts the beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds of the diverse groups (Norton, 2005).

For the second language learners, reading the literature from other cultures is one way to improve their appreciation for both the target culture and people from that cultural background (Dieterich, 1972). As Huck (1990) notes, multicultural literature crawls inside the individual's skin. Block (2003, p.127) further illustrates that multicultural literature is "a powerful vehicle for maturing literacy abilities, increasing understanding across cultures, and seeing the world in a new way".

Cross-Cultural Awareness and Appreciation

Many studies reveal that a cross-cultural curriculum can enhance children's cultural awareness and appreciation. The process of cross-cultural experiences may lead to increased intercultural perception (Salyer, 1993). The concept of cross-cultural awareness and appreciation may be facilitated as depicted by Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby's conceptual model of culture learning (2003). This model distinguishes between culture-specific and culture-general domains of learning. Culture-specific learning refers to the acquisition of skills and knowledge of a given culture while culture-general learning refers to skills and knowledge transferable across culture. The teacher can promote an awareness of cultural diversity by directing student attention to cross-cultural differences and then to intra- and inter-cultural variations of linguistic differences (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby, 2003).

Several researchers have developed models of intercultural sensitivity to provide educational support and challenge for the language learner. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) describes two major stages, ethnocentric and ethno-relative that learners move through in their development of intercultural competence (Bennett, 1993). The six stages are denial, defence, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Similarly, Salzer (1993) proposes a six-stage model of cross-cultural appreciation, including ignorance, rejection, approximation, awareness, approval, and versatility. Christensen (1989) proposes a model of

cross-cultural awareness that includes five stages: unawareness, beginning awareness, conscious awareness, consolidated awareness, and transcendent awareness.

The value of these models for language and culture teachers is their development of cross-cultural awareness and appreciation. They assist the teacher to plan the curriculum, teach toward it, and assess student development within that framework (Lange, 2003). Kirk's (1996) and Doering's (1997) studies support the idea that cultural awareness can be improved by means of a well-designed curriculum. Kirk's kindergarten curriculum allows children to verbalise their prejudices and fears as well as to consider how they feel about each other, while Doering's geography curriculum uses integrated units, literature based instruction, and cooperative learning.

Research Purposes and Questions

Given the emphasis on culture in foreign language learning as well as the increasing growing population of Chinese-speaking students in the United States schools, it is important to examine the implementation of culture as the core in the Chinese language and culture program. The thematic unit of Chinese festivals was introduced to a kindergarten classroom in a public elementary school in the Mid-Hudson area in New York State. This study examined three major topics. First of all it explored how Chinese culture and language learning could be integrated in the thematic unit of Chinese festivals. Next it examined how the thematic unit was implemented, that is, was the thematic unit supportive of culturally responsive pedagogy? The final phase examined the assessment of children's learning in the Chinese Festival Unit and assessed how well children learnt from this thematic unit and whether the children made significant progress in achieving the learning goals.

METHOD

Participants

This is a small-scale action research study. Nine kindergarten children who attended a public elementary school in New York State during the 2004-2005 academic year were selected with approval from the local campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as permission from the district superintendent, school principal, and their parents. The participants included four girls and five boys, ranging from age five to six years. There was one Taiwanese girl, one adopted Chinese girl, and seven Caucasian children. Only the Taiwanese girl spoke Chinese at home while all others spoke English. For all children except the Taiwanese girl, this thematic unit was their first experience of learning about Chinese culture and language.

Procedure

The study involved the development, implementation, and assessment of a unit on Chinese festivals. The unit, which was developed by the investigator, consisted of topics of five culturally-representative Chinese traditional festivals-(a) the Lunar New Year, (b) the Lantern Festival, (c) Chinese Memorial Day, (d) the Dragon Boat Festival, and (e) the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. These five festivals were organised and mapped out using topics and guided questions, content knowledge, activities, New York State Learning Standards, Standards for Foreign Language Learning, goals, objectives, assessment, and resource materials. A sample curriculum map is presented in Appendix A. The thematic unit of Chinese Traditional Festivals was integrated with the academic subjects of English Language Arts, Arts, and Languages Other Than English. As Tiedt and Tiedt (2005) noted, the use of a thematic approach to organise learning activities was appropriate for studies that cross several academic subjects.

This thematic unit was put into practise once a week for eight consecutive weeks, and each session lasted for 50 minutes from 8:10 to 9:00am during the before school session. This thematic unit involved a variety of literacy activities. Children read, listened to, and reflected on the

festival-related picture books; they related the book to their life experiences either through oral discussion, drawing, or writing; they made the Chinese Zodiac; they sounded out and wrote the Chinese characters; they read lantern riddles; they counted using the numbers one to ten and spoke greetings in Chinese; they made paper lanterns, dragon puppets, lucky banners, shuttlecocks, and dragon boats, and shadow puppets; they played with the puppet theatre; sang the Chinese songs; and showed their favourite part of the Chinese festivals by drawing and writing.

The curriculum activities have been described in detail in the first section of the findings and discussion. The curriculum revision and development took into account the evaluation of children's learning, which was obtained from the cultural artefacts, drawing and writing products, oral responses to interview questions, and written responses to the Pictorial Attitudes Scale. Children's cultural artefacts such as paper lanterns, dragon boats, shuttlecocks were completed in class while the drawing and writing products were collected during the last class meeting. Three sample drawings and writings are included in Appendix E.

Both the oral interview and Pictorial Attitudes Scale were administered through diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. The diagnostic and summative assessments were conducted during the first and last class meetings. The formative assessment took place at the end of each lesson. The Pictorial Attitudes Scale was conducted in a whole-group session. At the end of each lesson, each student was given a sheet from the Pictorial Attitudes Scale and was asked to colour in one specific face (☺ ☹ ☺) showing how he or she felt about the learning activities, whether listening to the story, making the artefact, writing the Chinese characters, counting using the numbers, or speaking the greetings.

At the end of each class, two to three children were randomly selected for an oral interview. The investigator approached an individual child who had done his or her individual work and then obtained his or her assent for a short personal interview. Numerous open-ended questions were asked to probe children's interests, questions, or reflections on the learning activities. Questions were asked to probe children's reflection on their learning. The follow-up questions varied depending on each subject's response. The interview lasted for two to three minutes for each child selected.

Sample oral questions were described as follows. Can you tell me anything about Chinese festivals? How do Chinese people celebrate the Lunar New Year? Can you speak Chinese greetings or write Chinese characters? Do you know how to make Chinese New Year crafts? Can you count using the numbers from one to ten in Chinese? Can you name the major parts of your body, for example, head, shoulder, knee, toe, eye, ear, mouth, and nose in Chinese? What did you hope to learn from this lesson? Did you like today's story, art, or craft activities? Why did you like it? Which was your favourite project or craft? Which was your favourite festival?

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed. The quantitative data was obtained from the Pictorial Attitudes Scale (Appendix B) and a comparison of student performance between diagnostic and summative assessment (Appendix C). The children's response to the Pictorial Attitudes Scale was tallied, and then the frequency distribution of the responses was presented (Appendix B). The number of students obtaining each learning goal in both the diagnostic and summative assessments was tallied and compared (Appendix C). The qualitative data were derived from the oral interview. Children's oral responses to one to one interview were transcribed, conceptualised, and grouped into categories. The transcribed data were broken down into discrete ideas and were then given a conceptual name or label. The name was taken either from the words of the participants or given by the investigator because of the meaning derived from the ideas verbalised. The conceptual names were then grouped into higher level categories. The presentation of the qualitative data was intertwined with the quantitative data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first section presents the curriculum content and the process of curriculum development of this thematic unit; the second section explores the application of culturally responsive pedagogy in this thematic unit; the final section presents the results of student learning in the thematic unit on Chinese festivals.

Culture as the Core of the Thematic Unit

Given the acknowledgment of culture as a vital part in second language learning, Chinese festivals became the core of this thematic unit. Nehru indicated that “Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit,” as cited in Hanson and Lynch (1990). Crozet and Liddicoat (2000) believed that culture determined not only what information was conveyed but also how information was delivered and perceived. The thematic unit was implemented in a kindergarten classroom, within which the investigator regarded herself as a cultural educator and ranked the learning of culture higher than language proficiency. In such a formal and structured context, the curriculum map was organised to guide the teaching and learning. By aligning this thematic unit with five traditional Chinese festivals, culture became the core of student learning.

Mapping out the thematic unit of five traditional festivals

The curriculum map illustrated what was really going on in this thematic unit as children moved through the different topics and learning activities. Guided questions on the five festivals were listed by week:

- Week 1: How did Lunar New Year begin? How did dragons, lions, lights, and firecrackers become part of the farmer’s celebration of the New Year?
- Week 2: Getting Ready for the New Year. What do people do to prepare for the Lunar New Year? What New Year greetings were and still are used?
- Week 3: The Chinese Zodiac. What is the order of the years in the Chinese calendar? What are the characteristics of each of the twelve animals?
- Week 4: The Lunar New Year Celebration—Lantern Festival 1. When and how do people celebrate the Lantern Festival? What types of lanterns do you like?
- Week 5: Lunar New Year Celebration—Lantern Festival 2. What does a dragon look like? What does a dragon symbolise in the Chinese society? Have you ever seen a dragon dance?
- Week 6: Chinese Memorial Day, also called the Clear Brightness Festival. When does the Chinese Memorial Day take place? What do people do during the Clear Brightness Festival?
- Week 7: The Dragon Boat Festival. Why and how do people celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival? What does a dragon boat look like? Why do people eat rice dumplings or dragon boat dumplings?
- Week 8: Mid-Autumn Moon Festival or Harvest Moon Festival. Why is it also called Harvest Moon Festival? What is a moon cake? How do people celebrate the Harvest Moon Festival?

The thematic curriculum was integrated with subjects of English Language Arts, Arts, and Languages other than English and was in compliance with the New York State Learning Standards (NYSED, 2004) and Standards for Foreign Language Learning (National Standards, 1999). Appendix D lists the learning goals with corresponding NYS Learning Standards (NYSED, 2004) and Standards for Foreign Language Learning (National Standards, 1999). According to the New York State Learning Standards, the learning of languages other than

English should enable children to develop cross-cultural skills and understanding as well as to use a language other than English for communication. The Standards for Foreign Language Learning has identified these two learning goals as Culture and Communication. Some basic conversation and those terms of children's interests such as number counting and the major parts of the human body as well as the festival-related cultural artefacts were integrated into this thematic unit.

Integration of cross-cultural literature into the thematic unit

Chinese cultural and ethnic heritage was introduced through children's literature in the topics of Chinese traditional festivals. The investigator used literature as interactive read-aloud resources in the introductory stage of each lesson. Reading several sections about a selected festival gave children a number of perspectives of each festival and helped the children scaffold and construct their understanding of festival related customs. The investigator also encouraged children to make connections between the literature and the activities such as crafts undertaken in the lesson.

The response to the Pictorial Attitudes Scale (Appendix B) indicated that most children in this study found these books appealing and were eager to read and talk about them. As Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (2005) indicated, literature for children led to the enjoyment, imagination, inspiration, vicarious experience, and understanding as well as connecting it to cultural heritage. The festival-related picture books offered children opportunities to gain information about Chinese culture while the illustrations engaged the children's imagination.

The English version of children's picture books was selected for the children in this study and drew on the notion that children learn best when using their principal language (Tiedt and Tiedt, 2005). Literature selected for this study included folktales, fiction, and non-fiction. The folktales were stories handed down from generation to generation and connected the children to the past and the roots of Chinese culture and heritage; the fiction presented the stories of Chinese people's experiences in celebrating festivals; and the non-fiction provided facts about Chinese festivals, culture, and heritage. Both folktales and non-fiction needed instruction and interpretation along the way while the fiction had an immediate appeal for many of the children. By using numerous books throughout the course of the thematic unit, children were exposed to diverse views on each festival.

Folktales used in this study include a wild beast as an origin of New Year celebration in Chinese New Year: Holidays and Festivals (Flanagan and Zhurkina, 2003), twelve animals in the Chinese Zodiac in Celebrating Chinese New Year (Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998), message hid inside the moon cakes in China: The Culture (Kalman, 2001), and the tale of Qu Yuan in Moonbeams, Dumplings and Dragon Boats: A Treasury of Chinese Holiday Tales, Activities and Recipes (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002). Fiction included Lion Dancer: Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year (Waters and Slovenz-Low, 1990), Chinese New Year's Dragon (Sing and Liu, 1994), Celebrating Chinese New Year (Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998), Moon Festivals (Russell and Zhang, 1997), Festival Time! Lanterns and Firecrackers: A Chinese New Year story (Zucker and Cohen, 2004), Paper Lanterns (Czernecki, 2001), and Festival Time! Lanterns and Firecrackers: A Chinese New Year Story (Zucker and Cohen, 2004).

Non-fiction literature included Happy New Year: Kung-Hsi Fa-Tsai (Demi, 1997), Gung Hay Fat Choy: Happy New Year (Behrens, 1991), Dragon Boat Festival (Shui and Thompson, 1999), Awakening the Dragon: The Dragon Boat Festival (Chan and Zhang, 2004), Chinese New Year: Holidays and Festivals (Flanagan, and Zhurkina, 2003), Moonbeams, Dumplings and Dragon Boats: A Treasury of Chinese Holiday Tales, Activities and Recipes (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002), China: The Culture (Kalman, 2001), Chinese Food and Drink (Shui, and Thompson, 1999), Dragon Dance: A Chinese New Year Lift-the-Flap Book (Holub and Huang, 2003), and Red Eggs and Dragon Boats: Celebrating Chinese Festivals (Stepanchuk, 1994).

Five traditional festivals

The thematic unit of Chinese Festivals is aligned with five major traditional festivals, which are celebrated according to the Chinese lunar calendar. In the Chinese society, the lunar calendar used to count the passing years is based on the cycles of the moon (Kalman, 2001). There are 12 months in a year, and each month starts on the new moon (Stepanchuk, 1994). Each year is named after an animal, and each animal has certain characteristics (Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998). The order of the years in the lunar calendar is Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig (Demi, 1997). These 12 animals constitute the Chinese Zodiac. The individual personality is considered to resemble the characteristic of the animal that the individual birth year is named after.

There are five important festivals celebrated in Chinese communities and society. They include Chinese New Year, the Lantern Festival, Clear Brightness Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. Chinese New Year starts on the first day of the first lunar month, and Lantern Festival takes place on the fifteenth day after the first new moon. Clear Brightness Festival is held in April of the Western Calendar to honour family ancestors. The Dragon Boat Festival is held in remembrance of the politician and poet Qu Yuan and is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. The Chinese celebrate the harvest season with the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival to give thanks to the full moon in the eighth lunar month.

The Chinese New Year celebration begins with New Year's Eve feast and ends with the lantern Festival held two weeks later. Chinese New Year has been celebrated for more than 4,000 years (Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998). Farmers in old China started to celebrate the holiday to mark the end of winter and the beginning of spring (Flanagan and Zhurkina, 2003). A week before the New Year is the time when Chinese families prepare for the New Year celebration. They clean up the house, sweep out the old or bad luck, get a haircut, buy new clothes or shoes, pay all debts, put out peach or plum trees, decorate the doors and windows with lucky phrases written on red paper in black or gold ink, send the Kitchen God to heaven, and cook special food for the New Year's Eve feast (Demi, 1997; Flanagan and Zhurkina, 2003; Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998). There are dragon dances, lion dances, and lantern parades to scare away the evil spirits (Demi, 1997). Chinese people believe that all of these activities will bring forth a year of great fortune and prosperity.

On the fifteenth day of the Chinese Lunar New Year, the Lantern Festival is celebrated. The streets and parks are lit by hundreds of lanterns of all kinds and shapes, such as fish, pigs, dragons, horses, birds, and flowers. The traditional lanterns are made of paper, bamboo, coloured glass paper, and silk. The lanterns are illuminated by candles and carried on sticks. The Lantern Festival is also called Yuan Xiao Festival in Taiwan. Yuan Xiao is one type of sweet rice ball with fillings, such as sweet red beans, lotus seeds, coconut, peanuts, or sesame seeds (Shui and Thompson, 1999). The rice balls are served in sweet soup and represent happiness and family reunion (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002).

Both lion and dragon dances are important in the celebration of Chinese New Year and the Lantern Festival. Chinese people believe that both lion and dragon dances will scare away evil spirits and bring good luck. The lions' and dragons' bodies are made of brilliant coloured satiny cloth (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002). The lion sculptures are regarded as guards and are often placed outside the important buildings (Kalman, 2001). The dragon is considered as a well-meaning creature and a protector for the people (Chan and Zhang, 2004). It is a symbol of strength (Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998), spring, and new life (Kalman, 2001). The lion and dragon dancers leap and dance to the beat of drums along with a horn, firecrackers, and roaring crowds.

The Clear Brightness Festival or Qing Ming Festival is the Chinese Memorial Day. The term 'Qing-Ming' literally means 'clear brightness' (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002, p.34). The Clear

Brightness Festival takes place in April of the Western calendar. It is the time when flowers are ready to blossom, trees are sprouting tender buds, the air is clear and pure, and the sky is light and bright (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002). Chinese families tidy their ancestors' graves by clearing weeds, planting flowers, and sweeping the tombstone. Then food offerings of meat, vegetables, rice cakes, egg rolls, and fruit are set out for their family ancestors. After their ancestors have enjoyed the food offerings, the food is shared with families and relatives who take part in this event (Stepanchuk, 1994). This festival is all about remembering family ancestors. It originates from the tradition that caring for elderly was an obligation and responsibility in the Chinese agricultural society (Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998). Therefore, strong family bonds are established in traditional Chinese society where children grow up with feelings of belonging to a family and a community.

The Dragon Boat Festival takes place on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. It is held to honour the patriotic poet, Qu Yuan, who lived 2,300 years ago in old China (Chan and Zhang, 2004; Stepanchuk, 1994). There were seven kingdoms in China, and the Chu and Qin were the two most powerful kingdoms at that time (Chan and Zhang, 2004). Qu Yuan served as a loyal minister to the king of the Chu kingdom, but others were jealous of Qu Yuan's close relationship to the king. These corrupt, jealous advisors accused Qu Yuan of treason and disloyalty when he advised his king against signing a suspected peace agreement with the enemy kingdom of Qin. Qu Yuan continued to express his love for the king and people in the Chu kingdom while he was in dishonourable exile. In 288 B.C., Qu Yuan decided to end his life by throwing himself into the Miluo River when the Chu kingdom was conquered by the enemy, the kingdom of Qin (Chan and Zhang, 2004). People launched their boats to search for Qu Yuan's body and threw handfuls of rice in bamboo leaves to distract the fish from his body.

Today people eat rice packages and hold dragon boats races in remembrance of Qu Yuan. During the festival, crowds gather along the banks of rivers to watch the dragon boat races. The dragon boat is about 40 to 100 feet long with 20 paddlers (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002). The prow is made of a beautifully carved dragonhead, the hull is colourfully painted, and the dragon tail is attached to the stern (Kalman, 2001).

The Mid-Autumn Moon Festival takes place on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. It is also called Harvest Moon Festival (Kalman, 2001; Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002). Chinese people celebrate the harvest season by giving thanks to the full moon. Moon cakes are prepared to share with friends and relatives during the festival. The moon cakes contain a variety of sweet or salty fillings, such as red bean, lotus, almond paste, eggs, or meat fillings. Moon cakes have special meaning in Chinese history. About 700 years ago, the Mongols, the invaders from the north, ruled China. Chinese people hid message inside the moon cakes and passed the cakes around to inform everyone of a secret plan to protect their homeland. The Chinese people gathered and succeeded in overthrowing the Mongols (Kalman, 2001). Therefore, the moon cakes are also associated with the victory over the Mongols.

In sum, the design of this thematic unit acknowledges that culture is a dominant factor embedded in both the teaching and learning processes. The thematic unit of Chinese festivals has been constructed and implemented based on students' prior knowledge, cultural experiences, and reflection on the current learning as well as the investigator's experiences and knowledge of the Chinese culture and heritage.

The Application of a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

This study is supportive of what Irvine and Armento (2001) identified as a culturally responsive pedagogy, within which critical reflection was a vital part. The classroom-based learning invited children to reflect and relate the materials to a wider cultural knowledge base. Underlying this practice was the philosophy of learning and teaching that focused on both the teacher's and students' reflection. Howard (2003) noted that culturally relevant teaching depended on critical

reflection by both teachers' and students' on their culture. Children in this study were engaged in a discourse about culture when they were asked to reflect on cultural differences. Children were encouraged to share their experiences about United States festivals and Chinese festivals and further to reflect on cultural differences. Specifically, children were asked to compare Chinese and American foods, customs, and costumes. Sample questions included, 'American New Year is...while Chinese New Year is...' As a result, children in this study were able to note the similarities and differences between cultures as well as shared traits of both cultures. Children could then apply the knowledge to further their learning and interpret cultural acts in a real context. Children in this study also seemed to acquire cultural knowledge by communicating with the investigator, a native speaker of Chinese. As Damen (2003) indicated, a practical means to learn cultural skills was to exchange actively with cultural informants, such as the native speakers.

The thematic unit of Chinese Traditional Festivals is compatible with culturally responsive pedagogy. Irvine and Armento (2001) indicated that teacher knowledge and reflection were ingredients for culturally responsive lesson. They further note that a culturally responsive classroom was where all the students and the teacher had a sense of caring and trust, where students' needs and interests were met, where the teacher taught to and through strengths of students, where students' reflection and experiences were incorporated into teaching, and where diverse values and beliefs were respected.

The culturally responsive instruction acknowledges children's needs and interests, relies on close relationship between the teacher and students, and connects learning to cultural referents. Assessment of children's culture and language learning provides feedback to both children and the investigator about the nature of children's cultural and linguistic understanding.

In this study, children's knowledge and experiences were incorporated in the teaching of Chinese Traditional Festivals. For example, one of the children's familiar songs entitled Head, Toes, Knees, and Toes was translated into Chinese and was integrated into the teaching activities. Simple counting from one to ten was introduced to connect with their growing number sense. The investigator was also responsive to children's needs, interests, and learning preferences; both the diagnostic and formative assessments provided feedback to the curriculum design and revision. Both the oral interview and written survey of the Pictorial Attitudes Scale enabled the investigator to gain knowledge of the representative culture in the class.

The investigator also spent considerable classroom time developing and maintaining relationships with the children. By listening to children's personal experiences and comments, the investigator successfully built a rapport with those children in this study. For example, the investigator asked children to share their experiences about Chinese New Year, Chinese food, and Chinese cultural artefacts. Children were asked to express themselves openly about their attitudes to the learning activities, and they were usually willing to verbalise their thoughts and feelings about each festival. Children were also provided with the Pictorial Rating Scale to colour in one specific face (☺ ☹ ☹) to show how they felt about the stories, the cultural artefacts, the Chinese characters, and Chinese greetings. Finally, children were encouraged to build meaning and represent learning by drawing or writing about the Chinese festivals.

Festival-related crafts were used as cultural referents to help children acquire knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes. As Ladson-Billings (1992) noted, a culturally responsive pedagogy used cultural referents to empower children socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Festival-related crafts were also used to develop cross-cultural understanding. Children linked festival-related crafts to the Chinese festivals. For example, the red lucky banners and Chinese Zodiac are associated with the Lunar New Year; paper lanterns are linked to the Lantern Festival; dragon boats and rice packages in bamboo leaves are connected to the Dragon Boat Festival; the puppet theatre is linked to the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival.

A culturally responsive teacher should be willing to understand student's prior knowledge and cultural experiences, connect students' cultural experiences to new learning, allow students to participate in planning learning activities, use culturally familiar language, encourage students to construct meaning and represent learning in their own way, use manipulative materials, and align authentic assessment in the teaching and learning process, such as teacher observation, oral interviews, and student exhibitions (Irvine and Armento, 2001).

Assessment of Children's Learning

The assessment of the children's learning is based on oral interviews and the Pictorial Attitudes Scale as well as the cultural products and cultural artefacts, drawings, writing, and the puppet theatre play. The assessment of culture learning focuses on both the objective culture (cultural artefacts) as well as subjective culture (as in language use). The systematic inclusion of cultural components in this thematic unit does increase the children's motivation to study the Chinese language. The assessment reveals the children's knowledge of Chinese culture and heritage, the skills of craft making, attitudes toward learning activities, and experiences in cultural encounters.

The comparison between diagnostic and summative assessments

Data were based on the diagnostic and summative assessments as well as both the formative assessment, that is the ongoing learning experience, and the portfolio with the festival-related artefacts, drawings, and hands-on activities. The assessments used in this study cover three domains of learning: affective, behavioural, and cognitive. The affective domain of learning is shown in the results from the Pictorial Attitudes Scale while cognitive and behavioural learning is manifested from the festival-related crafts and oral interviews.

Assessing children's reactions and responses was a useful means of examining the effects of instruction. Children made significant progress in terms of the four learning goals, presented in Appendix C (for d.f. = 6, a t-value of 8.33, $p < 0.01$). Because the probability value meets the criterion for significance (that is, $p < 0.01$), there was significant difference of the number of children who achieved the learning goals between the diagnostic and summative assessments. The diagnostic assessment revealed that only two children were able to name one Chinese traditional festival (Chinese New Year), described the festival-related customs, and had experience in making festival-related artefacts. On the other hand, all of them were able to name all festivals except the Clear Brightness Festival, recall the festival-related customs, and make festival-related crafts in the summative assessment.

In this study, children's learning focused more on culture-specific rather than culture-general learning given the time constraint and the young age group selected for this study. In terms of culture-specific learning, the children demonstrated their knowledge of basic greetings, customs, and heritage relevant to a given Chinese festival; they displayed skills of craft making and speaking the Chinese greetings. As the summative assessment revealed, most of the children demonstrated the ability to speak basic greetings although many of them were not able to recall the Chinese characters, count the numbers, or name the major parts of the human body. Children were familiar with the basic greetings, such as Ni Hao (How are you?), Wo Ai Ni (I love you!), Zao An (Good morning!), Zai Jian (Bye-bye!), Ba Ba (Father), and Ma-ma (mother). On the other hand, only one girl demonstrated the ability to count using the Chinese numbers and name the major parts of the human body, and only the simple Chinese characters (一/one, 二/two, 三/three) were recalled by three children.

It is possible that a greater time frame for learning a new language (Chinese) is needed. As Bialystok (1997) indicates that the amount of time involved in practising a second language is one significant factor affecting acquisition. While the languages with alphabetic writing systems use letters to represent phonemes, the Chinese writing system consists of characters and each Chinese character consists of complex combination between pronunciation and phonetic and semantic

components (Chen, Shu, Wu, and Anderson, 2003). Children in this study needed to have more inter-structure knowledge of characters in order to memorise the characters as a whole.

Illustration of children's learning and reflection

Children were highly motivated to learn about Chinese Traditional Festivals, and their comments were certainly rewarding to the investigator who had undertaken a challenge to develop a thematic unit of Chinese Festivals aligned with New York State Learning Standards. The children decided to participate in this study because of: (a) the connection to cultural origin ("I came from China."), (b) parental desire ("My mom decided it and signed on the paper."), (c) learning motivation ("I want to learn how to speak Chinese."), (d) experience ("Because I know Chinese stuff, different stuff. I like Chinese stuff.), or (e) interest ("Because it's fun."). Both the factors of connection to cultural origin and experience with Chinese people or cultural products were associated with integrative motivation while the factors of parental desire and interest were related to instrumental motivation. As the Standards for Foreign Language (National Standards, 1999, p.3) indicated, for some people the purpose and use of foreign languages was to "seek greater understanding of other people and other cultures". Many other factors that might have influenced language and culture learning, as suggested by the socio-education model detailed by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), included learning style, intelligence, previous language background, language aptitude, and strategy use. More data are needed to identify the effect of these factors on children's learning of Chinese culture and language.

Despite of their limited knowledge of Chinese festivals, as revealed in the diagnostic assessment (Appendix C), children conveyed their interests in writing Chinese characters, speaking Chinese, and making Chinese crafts. Children expressed their interests in learning some (a) Chinese characters ("I like Chinese words." "Learn some Chinese words." "When we did lantern riddles over there."), different stuff ("Learn different stuff."), (b) numbers ("I learn Chinese numbers three and four."), and (c) greetings ("Kong Xi Fa Cai, 恭禧發財, Happy New Year!). "Chinese characters are fun to learn because it's cool", said one child. Children expressed their intention to increase linguistic proficiency. On the other hand, the goal of appreciating the Chinese culture seems to be difficult to assess practically for beginner-level language students.

In this thematic unit, Chinese language acquisition parallels culture learning. The majority of children (seven out of the nine) were very interested in learning to speak the Chinese greetings although they had difficulty sounding out the four tones accurately. The greetings introduced in this thematic unit included Ni Hao (你好, How are you!), Zao An (早安, Good morning!), Zai Jian (再見, Good bye!), Kong Xi Fa Cai (恭禧發財, Happy New Year!). Chinese language adopts a morpho-syllabic system (Perfetti and Zhang, 1995). That is, each Chinese character represents a morpheme and is pronounced as a monosyllable (Wang, Perfetti, and Liu, 2003). Therefore, the pronunciation and tones of Chinese language are very different for those who only speak an alphabetic language (for example., English). There are five tones in Mandarin Chinese, including four major tones (i.e., the first, second, third, and fourth tones) and the neutral tone. Tone is a unique feature of spoken Chinese, and tone matching requires the learner to isolate the tone from its rhyme and then to differentiate between the tones (Wang, Perfetti, and Liu, 2003). Given the diverse tones, many beginning Chinese learners have difficulty in tone matching.

Children in this study seemed to have lower motivation in learning to write than to speak Chinese. "I like to speak Chinese language more than to write the words," said one child. "It's hard to write Chinese symbols," said another child. "I don't like writing. It's boring," said yet another child. Although children acknowledged the challenge of writing Chinese characters, they were willing to try. "When I see something, I copy it and work it out at the end." Drawing on children's concern, the rote reproduction of Chinese characters was only a by-product resulting from the reading of children's picture books or from tangible elements of the Chinese culture (e.g., red lucky banner or the New Year's couplets). Meanwhile, only the simple characters were

taught in this study, including the characters for 田 (field), 山 (mountain), 一 (one), 二 (two), 三 (three), 四 (four), 五 (five), 六 (six), 七 (seven), 八 (eight), 九 (nine), and 十 (ten). For the alphabetical readers, the simple characters can be learned much more rapidly and accurately than the compound ones (Wang, Perfetti, and Liu, 2003).

The character is the basic unit of the Chinese writing system (Wang, Perfetti, and Liu, 2003). Chinese is considered as a logographic writing system (Chen, Shu, Wu, and Anderson, 2003), and a Chinese character is composed of strokes (Wang, Perfetti, and Liu, 2003). Some Chinese characters are pictorial and are viewed as pictographs (Hansen, 2004). The Chinese-speaking children make significant progress in writing when they understand the structure of the characters (Shu, 2003). Therefore, in this study the structure of the Chinese characters has been introduced to the children in order to make the logographic writing system meaningful to them.

The artefact making activities allowed children to work with concrete materials, maintain active involvement, and further explore cultural meaning. In most cases, artefact making was children's favourite learning activities, and children seemed to enjoy learning by doing ("I like when we do projects, the one we just did." "Making stuff."). These activities provided children with authentic and meaningful learning experiences. Wallace (2006, p.216) asserted that "use of concrete materials and firsthand experiences are essential in learning complex concepts". Similarly, Bickart, Jablon, and Dodge (1999) indicated that young children's thinking relies on their actions, and they learnt much better through direct involvement with materials.

Among the five festivals, those children (seven, in total) interviewed expressed their preference of the festivals for the Lunar New Year, the Lantern Festival, and the Dragon Boat Festival. They linked these festivals to their favourite cultural artefacts. For example, the red envelope, firecracker, and dragon boat are all related to Lunar New Year; paper lanterns are linked to Lantern Festival; rice dumplings are associated with the Dragon Boat Festival; and both red and gold are considered as the favourite colours for Chinese people.

The project on the Chinese zodiac allowed children to learn the order of the years by pasting the 12 animals in a clockwise direction. "I never knew the order of the animals round in I just did," said one child. "The clock thing. Because it is fun," said another child. "When we did clock, put all the animals on the clock. It is great!" said the other child. They also learned the characteristics of each animal as well as the kind of animal that their birth year was named after. Eight of them were born in the year of rabbit, and one in the year of tiger.

The game of lantern riddles seemed to attract their attention. One child conveyed his excitement by saying "I like reading the lantern riddles." Another child said, "I like reading things." Riddles written on slips of paper were hung from decorative mobiles. These mobiles were made of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac, including a mouse, an ox, a tiger, a rabbit, a dragon, a snake, a horse, a goat, a monkey, a rooster, a dog, and a pig. The lantern riddles were selected from the well-known riddles for this age group². Sample riddles included: (1) I am a ruler, but I have two feet, not one; and (2) I smell, but I have no nose. Children were encouraged in reading the riddles aloud and then guessing the answer. The opportunity of reading riddles enhanced children's decoding ability.

Children were all very excited when they made and played with the shuttlecock, as shown in Appendix B. "I like the shuttlecock because it's fun," said one child. The shuttlecock is called Jian Zi in Chinese, which can be played by one person or with others. When playing, the shuttlecock is thrown into the air and kicked with the inside of the heel. The object was to keep the shuttlecock in the air as long as possible (Kalman, 2001). The materials needed were a cork, or a coin with a hole with a couple of feathers attached to it (Kalman, 2001). It may also be made

² Taken from the website <http://www.justriddlesandmore.com/kidsriddles.html>.

with two coins, with striped tissue paper covering the coins and fastened with a rubber band (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002).

The drawing samples presented in Appendix E illustrate children's preferred hand-on projects. Children in this study were encouraged to represent their learning by drawing or writing. The first drawing showed a girl's preference for a female puppet and the puppet theatre associated with the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. The second drawing depicted a boy's picture of himself and his connection to those hands-on projects for different festivals, including paper lanterns, shuttlecock, a dragon boat, and fireworks. The third drawing and writing conveyed another boy's preference for the dragon puppet.

In sum, the findings reveal that (a) culture is a predominant part of this thematic unit, (b) this study is supportive of culturally responsive pedagogy, and (c) children can and do make progress in Chinese culture and language learning.

IMPLICATIONS

Given the diverse population in the United States, multicultural education is fundamental to recognise, preserve, and enhance cultural pluralism in American society. With an increasing number of Chinese-speaking students, multicultural education must expand to embrace this emerging population. This study suggests that the thematic approach is appropriate for designing the Chinese language program while curriculum maps may be used to align the learning standards, contents, skills, and assessment. The curriculum map may provide a realistic picture of the curriculum as well as account for student achievement. It provides the teacher with a useful tool to adopt this curriculum in his or her classroom practice.

This study also suggests that a Chinese culture and language course may meet the needs of the accountability era by integrating national and state standards into the curriculum design. Although the assessment of cultural learning is not easy, a clear sense of progress is provided given the connection of learning objectives to the learning standards. The expectation for learning in the form of standards gives guidance to the teacher by aligning the curriculum, carrying out the instructional activities, and administering the assessment (Lange, 2003).

Successful integration of culture into the curriculum may be a challenge to teachers. Therefore, it demands pre-service and in-service training opportunities for language teachers. Culture can be integrated into a language class from the inception of language learning. The teacher's role is not the purveyor of the good but rather a cultural mentor, guide, and partner in the development of both cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity to cross-cultural differences. In a culturally responsive classroom, teachers need to respond to their students by incorporating their students' cultural needs. The teacher need to expose the learner to the target culture by encouraging the learner to consider cultural differences, read culturally-embedded literature, and extend culture learning to the natural settings..

Children's literature can be a powerful tool for linking culture to language learning in the structured classroom. The literature accounts of customs, cultural heritage, and foods are useful in a Chinese-as-a-second language classroom. The cross-cultural literature can enhance children's understanding of the cross-cultural values and attitudes and further improve children's appreciation of people and their culture. Therefore, schools and homes need to provide enriched multicultural literature to minimise stereotypes about a culture as an objective of cultural enrichment.

In addition to the formal assessment, cultural artefacts can be good indicators of children's learning about culture. The craft-making activities give children an engaging way to learn more about the abstract concept of culture. Children in this study benefited from festival-related craft making. They were able to associate their favourite crafts or activities with a specific festival.

Therefore, the early childhood teachers need to provide concrete and direct experiences to help children explore more mature ideas about the world around them (Wallace, 2006).

Learning to speak and write Chinese can be a challenge to many English-speaking children. It requires the learners to differentiate between four major tones (Wang, Perfetti, and Liu, 2003), and they need encouragement to sound out the monosyllabic characters. Learning to write Chinese is an art as well as science. Each character needs to be written following a proper stroke order and be confined in a square box (Ng and Wu, 1990). Therefore, simple characters seem to be much easier to learn by the alphabetic readers than compound characters (Wang, Perfetti, and Liu, 2003). Considering the unique characteristics of Chinese language, the alphabetic learners can practise the monosyllabic pronunciation starting with the simple characters.

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

This study involved the development, implementation, and assessment of a culture-based thematic unit in a kindergarten classroom. Specifically, this study presented three major concerns: culture as the core in the development of the thematic unit of Chinese festivals, a culturally responsive pedagogy as a model of instruction, and the assessment of student learning by means of multiple methods such as diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, cultural artefacts, and drawing or writing products.

The thematic unit of Chinese Festivals represents a step toward understanding the actual learning of Chinese-as-a second-language students. It is hoped that this study may be able to generate a much needed concern of Chinese language and culture program not yet a part of United States public schooling. This study is also an effort toward an understanding of multicultural education that is needed with respect to Chinese language and culture program. It is intended as a sample thematic unit that can be of use to those committed teachers who attempt to teach a Chinese language and culture course.

Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

One limitation of this study is the constraint of the time frame to implement the thematic unit. An eight-week intensive program is not really sufficient to obtain progress in the four learning goals. An extension in the duration of the curriculum implementation is needed for future studies. For example, two sessions per week for 10 to 15 consecutive weeks may be appropriate to implement this thematic unit. Future study needs to provide sufficient time to encourage children to engage in the second-language acquisition, craft making, and learning about cross-cultural heritage and traditions.

With an emphasis on culture in the language program in a multicultural society, culture can become the core of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment of a foreign language. Given the limited research on aspects of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the Chinese language program, future studies need to rethink the process of Chinese language and culture teaching as well as the ways Chinese language is used in society.

The following questions may act as guides to language acquisition:

- (a) What is the conceptual development of the Chinese language and culture program?
- (b) Which particular aspect of Chinese culture should be taught—history, festivals, civilisation, or other aspects?
- (c) How should Chinese culture be integrated into Chinese language learning?
- (d) Is there a sample lesson plan or theoretical model for teachers to follow?

- (e) What are the effective ways to evaluate Chinese cultural learning?
- (f) How is the Chinese language learned when culture is integrated into the language program?
- (g) How does an English speaker acquire Chinese culture? and
- (h) How can a student's learning benefit from a multicultural classroom?

Given the limited studies of student motivation regarding Chinese language learning, there is a need to examine the construct and assessment methods of motivation in the Chinese as a second language population. The self-report measure of motivation is not very reliable. Furthermore, the motivation may vary as a function of the setting, classroom climate, and student composition (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby, 2003).

Finally, it is not easy to measure children's motivation and interest. Many factors influence language and culture learning. These include learning style, intelligence, previous language background, language aptitude, and strategy use (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993). In order to understand better and improve Chinese culture and language learning, future research needs to identify the conceptual distinctions between learner factors and the complex relationships between motivation, interest, attitudes, learning style, previous language background, and behaviour appropriate for language and culture learning as well as the environmental factors of classroom settings and climate, student composition, and curriculum outline.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CURRICULUM MAP OF THE CHINESE FESTIVALS

Week 1	
Topics or Guided Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did Lunar New Year begin? 2. How did dragons, lions, lights, and firecrackers become part of the farmer's celebration?
Content Knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Farmers celebrate the holiday to mark the end of winter and the beginning of spring (Flanagan and Zhurkina, 2003). 2. New Year greeting: Kong Xi Fa Cai (恭喜發財, Wish you be prosperous!) 3. The beast did not like loud noises, the red color, or bright lights.
Art, Craft or Literacy Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen to and reflect on the story <i>Chinese New Year: Holidays and festivals</i> (Flanagan and Zhurkina, 2003). 2. Speak "Kong Xi Fa Cai (恭喜發財, Wish you be prosperous!)" 3. Use a black marker to trace two Good Luck Characters: Cun (春spring) and Fu (福fortune).
Learning Goals	Goal 1, 2, 3 and 4
Learning Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students describe that Lunar New Year occurs at the end of winter and the beginning of spring. 2. Students identify the New Year celebration: dragon, lion, bright lights, firecrackers, and the color red. 3. Students can identify two characters: Cun (春spring) and Fu (福fortune).
National Standards for Foreign Language Learning	Standard 1.1 Standard 2.1 Standard 2.2 Standard 4.1
Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask short explanation question: "How did Lunar New Year begin?" "How did dragons, lions, lights, and firecrackers become part of the farmer's celebration?" 2. Individual interview to elicit students' reflection on this lesson.
Materials Needed	"8 x 8" piece of red paper, black thick marker or black acrylic paint.

APPENDIX B: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN RESPONSE TO PICTORIAL ATTITUDES SCALE

				No Answer or Missing Data
Story: Chinese New Year: Holidays and festivals (Flanagan and Zhurkina, 2003).	8	1	0	0
Speak “Kong Xi Fa Cai (恭喜發財, Wish you be prosperous!)	7	1	1	0
Project: Use a black marker to trace two Chinese characters: Cun (春spring) and Fu (福fortune).	9	0	0	0
Project: Make a zodiac, and paste the twelve animals on a circle-shape paper.	9	0	0	0
Speak and write two Chinese characters: 田(field) 山(mountain).	6	1	1	1
Story: Listen to the legends about the Chinese Zodiac (in Hoyt-Goldsmith and Migdale, 1998).	6	2	0	1
Listen to and read the storybook <i>Festival time! Lanterns and firecrackers: A Chinese New Year story</i> (Zucker and Cohen, 2004).	7	2	0	0
Project: Make a paper lantern	9	0	0	0
Speak the greetings: 你好! (How are you!), 早安(Good morning!), 再見(Good bye!).	8	0	0	1
Listen to the books <i>Light the lights</i> (Demi, 1997) and <i>Paper Lanterns</i> (Czernecki, 2001).	3	4	1	1
Project: Make a dragon puppet.	9	0	0	0
Story: <i>Picnics, Kite Flying, and Tidy Tombs</i> (Simonds, Swartz, and So, 2002) and Qing Ming Festival (Kalman, 2001).	6	3	0	0
Project: Shuttlecock	9	0	0	0
Story: <i>Dragon Boat Festival</i> (Shui and Thompson, 1999), <i>Awakening the Dragon</i> (Chan and Zhang, 2004), <i>The tale of Qu Yuan</i> (Simonds and Swartz, 2002).	7	2	0	0
Sing the song “頭兒(head), 肩膀(shoulders), 膝(knees), 腳趾(toes).”	6	1	1	1
Project: Make a dragon boat and play dragon-boat racing	9	0	0	0
Story: An old legend that Chinese people hid message inside the moon cakes and passed the cakes around to inform everyone of a secrete plan protecting their homeland (Kalman, 2001).	6	1	1	1
Project: Make a shadow puppet and play the “puppet theater” in the class for children to play with.	8	0	0	1
Counting the Numbers: 1-10	8	0	1	0

APPENDIX C: THE COMPARISON OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE BETWEEN DIAGNOSTIC AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS*

Learning Goals/Assessment	Diagnostic Assessment	Summative Assessment
Learning goal 1: The child will recall or identify the customs and heritages of the five traditional festivals.	2	9
Learning goal 2: The child can speak the basic Chinese greetings and name the major parts of the human body	1	7
Learning goal 3: The child can count and/or write Chinese numbers.	1	6
Learning goal 4: The child will make the festival-related artifacts.	2	9

* Each cell shows the number of children who achieve the goal.

***d.f.* = 6, *t* = 8.33, *p* < 0.01

APPENDIX D: LEARNING GOALS OF THE CHINESE TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS

Goal 1: *The child will recall or identify the Chinese customs and heritages of the five traditional festivals—Lunar New Year, Lantern Festival, Ching-Ming Festival (Memorial Day), Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Moon Festival.*

NYSLs: Languages Other Than English, Standard 2--Cultural Understanding.

English Language Arts, Standard 1--Language for Information and Understanding.

English Language Arts, Standard 2-- Language for Literary Response and Expression.

Goal 2: *The child will speak the basic Chinese greetings and name the major parts of the human body.*

NYSLs: Languages Other Than English, Standard 1--Communication Skills.

NYSLs: The Arts, standard 1—Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts.

Goal 3: Children will count and write Chinese numbers.

NYSLs: Languages Other Than English, Standard 1--Communication Skills.

Goal 4: *The child will make the festival-related crafts, including door couplets, Chinese zodiac, candle-lit lanterns, lantern riddles, dragon puppets, shuttlecock, dragon boat, shadow puppets, puppet theater, etc.*

NYSLs: Languages Other Than English, Standard 2--Cultural Understanding.

The Arts, Standard 1: Creating, performing, and Participating in the Arts.

The Arts, Standard 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources.

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE CHILDREN'S DRAWING AND WRITING

